



Thomas C. Meyer, MD

Widespread interest in health system reform

Thomas C. Meyer, MD, Medical Editor, Wisconsin Medical Journal

When it was decided last year to have an issue focused on “Affordable Care” I don’t believe any of us anticipated the response that has evolved. We find it sobering that there is the intense interest and concern about health system reform as is demonstrated in the pages of this issue. We decided to publish them in a compendium of ideas that could/should be considered in the upcoming debate.

Society President Mark Belknap, MD lays out many of the issues and exhorts our leadership potential in guiding the thoughts and actions as the process evolves in his invited editorial (p 17). There is much in the Society’s 2006-2008 Strategic Plan (p 19) to guide us as we continue to work. Maybe we should each choose one of the items to “champion” at our local level and hope that things come together in the years to come. Senator Feingold’s article (p 23) is both depressing and informative. The thought that it is necessary to introduce a bill to ensure that health care reform is even debated in Congress is difficult to comprehend.

The ideas that flow through the eight plans featured are fascinating to this reader. Doctor Pohlmann’s tax and voucher proposal indicates one way affordable care might be accomplished (p 25), the Wisconsin Health Project’s proposal for “Health Insurance Purchasing Accounts” for all under the age of 65 (p 28) is another interesting suggestion. The Wisconsin Health Care

Plan proposed by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO (p 31) is yet a third approach, this time with the possible oversight by labor/management. The Wisconsin Health Security Act paper of the Drs Farley (p 34) with its advocacy of a single insurer (as opposed to the current 700 insurers) must surely merit consideration. The plan put forward by the Wisconsin Health Care for All Inc. (p 38) raises the question of whether the system should be installed from the ground up—local implementation at city level with the expectation of spreading mergers—would be more feasible than top down. Co-op Care proposed by the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives (p 40) also advocates a “from the ground up” approach.

Doctor Paul Wertsch, a former Society president and longtime member of the its Health Care Reform Taskforce lays out the conclusions of the group with an article dealing with the nuts and bolts of the thinking that went into the two-year study (p 42). While the group chose not to posit a particular plan, they have done a sterling job of expanding the 2006-2008 Strategic Plan by laying out the criteria by which the Society will be able to fairly and accurately assess the multiple plans that are currently available—and will be forthcoming—in the debate. The thoughtful WEA Trust - New Wisconsin Idea is well laid out by Mr Jacobs, who points to the National Education

Association’s perception of the major failings of the current system and suggests some solutions (p 47).

Two reports of current efforts to assist the most needy follow. Logan and Mokrohisky describe the initiative of a large multidisciplinary clinic (p 50), while Guenzel and Sigmann describe their free clinic in Door County (p 52).

We salute all these authors and thank them for “letting us in” on their ideas. We can but imagine the huge effort that went into the development of these plans and thank them for allowing us to publish them.

The peer-reviewed section of the *Journal* had to be contracted to allow all the above wealth of ideas, but nevertheless there is much to mull over. Svenson documents the trials of hospital emergency departments in coping with ever-increasing growth rates, surely representative of the whole access problem (p 56). Kitambi and colleagues point up the current and future hazards of osteoporosis in African American women—another possible aspect in providing routine health care (p 59)—while Stolzman and her colleagues show how success in the managements of several chronic diseases requires the health care system to deal with a three-fold increase (over 20 years) in the incidence of end-stage renal disease (p 66). Finally Drs Hariharan and Denson’s case report documents their success with firm TLC in a “Challenging Patient” (p 72).

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